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ABSTRACT

Teacher education programs at Auburn University at Montgomery (Alabama) provide courses on multicultural education and personal relationship skills to develop in their students an understanding and sensitivity to ethnic bias and stereotyping in dealing with a culturally diverse classroom. The undergraduate component of the course acquaints students with the diverse populations in American society, the prejudices against these groups and the racial and ethnic stereotypes that permeate our society. The graduate component offers three courses on education in culturally diverse environments, curriculum in multicultural environments, and methods of teaching in multicultural environments. The personal relationships skills components focus upon developing a positive self-concept, and personal interactions in the classroom at the undergraduate level. An elective course at the graduate level stresses conceptual and practical familiarity with specific approaches and techniques designed to enhance the total development of school children. An evaluation of the effectiveness of these courses indicated that they are having an impact on the ethnic attitudes of perspective teachers. (JD)

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# ENHANCING THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS FOR TEACHERS

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ENHANCING THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS FOR TEACHERS

American society has greatly changed in the last ten years. The demographics released by the U. S. Census Bureau in the Fall of 1985, attest to this change. About 22% of individuals under 18 are living in poverty, up from 14.3% in 1970. Single-parent families have doubled since 1970 and now account for 26% of all families. One-third of Hispanic children live in single-parent homes; 49% of black children live with one parent, and 8% live with neither parent. Teenage pregnancy has increased dramatically in all ethnic and socioeconomic groups. About 700,000 students dropped out of school in 1984-85 and another 300,000 students were chronically truant.

One could go on iterating the new statistics of poverty but the above figures should begin to make it clear that our society is changing and if society is changing, then surely the world of the teacher in America is changing. Teacher Educators have a moral responsibility to prepare students to teach in our changing society. A successful teacher preparation program ten years ago will not suffice today. To meet the changing society, we must begin training teachers for the real world. We must prepare a cadre of teachers who will not go into culture shock when they enter the classrooms as teachers of record.

This concern of developing new approaches to Teacher Education has become a shared concern of Schools of Education, local school districts, state departments of education and state legislatures. In Alabama's Plan for Excellence in Education, for example, teachers will be required to have an understanding of ethnic and racial differences and to hold parent-teacher conferences on behalf of all students during a school year. As a result school districts are relying on faculty in teacher-training programs to impart ethnic and racial understandings and how to successfully conference with

students and parents using effective relationship skills.

To begin meeting this new challenge of preparing teachers to successfully deal with their environment, the School of Education at Auburn University at Montgomery (AUM) has identified two key areas - multicultural education and relationship skills. These issues are being attacked at both the graduate and the undergraduate level and programs in these areas are being developed for inservice education.

## MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

### Undergraduate Component

Our efforts in improving attitudes begin with instruction in multicultural education in the teacher-education program. In a multicultural program in Teacher Education, one of the first emphases should be an exposure to the many different ethnic/racial groups in our country with an emphasis on teacher attitudes during the instructional process. Through frank discussions of prejudice and stereotypes and techniques one may use in the instructional process to conteract prejudice and stereotypes, we will begin to have an impact on today's teachers so that the minority students of tomorrow will be treated with equity and have an equal opportunity to excel in teacher education.

With such foresight in mind, the School of Education at AUM began a multicultural program to enhance the instruction of minorities in the regular classroom. Spring Quarter, 1981, marked the first quarter that Multicultural Education became a required course for undergraduate Education majors at our institution. The general purposes of the course was to acquaint Teacher Education majors with the reality that America is a diverse society and that the classroom is a microcosm of the society.

The preparation and planning that went into establishing a required course in a curriculum already overcrowded with required competencies took serious planning and implementation. After two years of planning with much pressure put on the key members of the faculty to implement such a program, the program eventually developed substance and took form.

A two-pronged multicultural program evolved from the planning: one prong involving undergraduates and the other involving graduates. The undergraduate portion became required, while the graduate portion became an optional major elective of every program. This section will concentrate on the undergraduate portion since this aspect of the program has been evaluated and there are standard measurements on the effectiveness of the product that has been produced.

Before discussing the effectiveness of the undergraduate Multicultural program, the writer feels that it is necessary to first discuss the student competencies and outcomes of the multicultural requirement for all education majors.

The multicultural course is initially taken by junior Education majors. The content of the course acquaints students with the diverse populations in American society, the prejudices against these groups and the racial and ethnic stereotypes that permeate our society. The course is required of every teacher education major for one quarter of instruction. The class meets two hours once a week for ten weeks. During this time the students are inundated with the reality, that America is more than the Black and White Race. This last statement is a significant point because of the type of student that majors in education at our institution. The demographics of the typical undergraduate education major at our institution are as follows: white, middle class, female, age 22, from Central Alabama. Most of our students have had little exposure to other racial and/or ethnic groups other

than Black Americans. And, generally this exposure has been on a very superficial level. Thus, this course is intended to expose these typical students to the multicultural make-up of our society.

In the course, the instructor initially lectures on the diversity of race and ethnicity in America trying to ease the provincial attitudes held by most students. The lectures consist of material covering the nature of our pluralistic society, the historical background for this pluralism, an in-depth discussion of stereotypes and racism and finally, the mentality each individual has to have to successfully deal with students from various backgrounds.

After the lectures and discussions, each student must make a formal presentation in class on a particular racial/ethnic group. This presentation must cover the following points: where did the racial and/or ethnic groups originate from prior to settling in the United States; what types of prejudice did this group experience in their effort to assimilate the American culture; as a result of prejudices experienced, what survival techniques did the group engender to maintain their existence in their new homeland; what values and cultural mores did the group bring to America, and how have these been assimilated in the American culture; finally, and perhaps most important, how can you instruct children from different ethnic groups and make the instruction relevant to the individuals.

These considerations form the basis of the required undergraduate course.

The final exercise for the students is an oral exam. This exam is anxiety laden for the student but gives the instructor a good feel for each student in their own racial/ethnic identification and avails the instructor the opportunity on a personal basis to discuss the student's feelings about stereotyping and prejudices.

Graduate Component

The Graduate program with its emphasis in Multicultural education consists of three courses with each course worth five quarter hours. The courses are as follows: Education in culturally-diverse environments, Curriculum in multicultural environments, and Methods of teaching in multicultural environments.

The first course mentioned, education in culturally-diverse environments, was an elective course in the School of Education curriculum prior to the development of the new program. In the new curriculum pattern this course became the introduction to education that is multicultural. The main purposes here are:

1. To develop an appreciation for and an awareness of the multicultural character of the American Society.
2. To develop an understanding of the implications of a culturally diverse society for educational programming and practice.
3. To contribute to the development of an empirical knowledge loss in multicultural education.

Once this awareness level is developed, the student is then ready to undertake an in depth study into how to develop curriculum materials in education that is multicultural. The purposes of this second course are:

1. To develop an understanding of curriculum patterns in the development of multicultural materials,
2. To impart an understanding of the philosophical, psychological, social and economic forces affecting multicultural curriculum development.
3. To review recent teaching materials on education that is multicultural in light of the principles of sound curriculum development.

The third course in the sequence of multicultural courses is a field-based course. At this time, the students will begin to execute in their own

classrooms better multicultural approaches to their subject matter. The purposes of the methods course are:

1. To develop expertise in doing ethnographic studies within the classroom environment,
2. To develop expertise in matching multicultural materials with the comprehension level of the child.
3. To develop expertise in integrating multicultural materials in at least three subject matter areas in a field-based setting.

At the end of the program, it is anticipated that the teachers will be better able to relate to their multicultural students and that their instruction will be more meaningful to all students. Hopefully, by making the teacher more aware of culturally diverse patterns, the level of instruction will improve and the students should reflect this through better academic achievement.

Conclusion

These courses have now been offered for six years to our students and one has to wonder as to whether this awakening of future educators has had any impact on the real instruction of the students in the State of Alabama.

Through the assistance of the Truman Pierce Institute for the Advancement of Teacher Education, every beginning teacher in the State of Alabama for the last three years has been evaluated on their effectiveness in the classroom. The instruments used have assessed the students from the principal's perception and from the individual's perception of their effectiveness in the classroom. A part of each of these evaluations has been the multicultural component, i.e. how well the teacher has handled ethnic diversity in the classroom or how well prepared the teacher was to deal with ethnic diversity in the classroom. Overall, the students at AUM on the Principal's form and the Teacher's form scored on the average 10 percentage points

better than the other students in the State. Thus, we feel our students are entering the classroom prepared and competent to deal with the ethnic/racial diversity of the schools. As a matter of fact, the correlation between what the students (teachers) acquired during the course and their performance in the classroom as teachers of record is very high.

## RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

The philosophy of the AUM School of Education faculty is that imparting knowledge is important in a teacher's performance but understanding how to communicate and how to relate to other human beings are also important components for a teacher.

### Undergraduate Component

At the undergraduate level, relationship skills training is a requirement in the professional education program. The class meets once per week for a two-hour session. The initial session addresses the topic, "Developing a Positive Self-Concept." The second session emphasizes how teachers set a proper "tone" within the classroom and gives attention to facets of classroom management: the teacher, the student, the school.

Six management models: Jones, Canter, Neo-Skinnerian, Glasser, and Dreikurs, Ginott, receive attention in subsequent classes. Other topics addressed include "Mistaken Goals," "Understanding the purposes of Children's Behavior," "Goals of Misbehavior and How to Respond," "Parental Involvement," "Group Consensus Seeking vs. Democracy," "Group Leadership Skills," and "Group Management." The major vehicle for implementing instruction is problem-solving activities in which students are called on to provide suggestions for solving a crisis situation or for combating it through the use of one or more of the models.

Students are evaluated on their abilities to demonstrate their understanding of the conceptual bases of interpersonal relationships and their effect of learning and on demonstrating specific skills that are basic to effective interpersonal relationships. Specifically, students must demonstrate through written examination and simulation exercises their understanding and their interpersonal relationship skills as related to empathy, respect, genuineness, self-disclosure, concreteness, and confrontation. At the conclusion of the class students should show evicence of a greater sensitivity to their own personal values and the values of others, should show an understanding of the process of seeking group consensus, and should indicate an understanding of social mobility and social structure. Since its introduction into the curriculum, this course has been a favorite with our students and the instructors. Feedback from former students who are now in the classroom as teachers indicates that this and its related course, are extremely helpful to the teacher in the area of classroom management.

Graduate Component

Offered twice per year, the elective course, Relationship Skills in the Classroom, stresses conceptual and practical familiarity with specific approaches and techniques designed to enhance the total development of school children. Experiential emphases are included.

Initially, the class participants "get acquainted" through interaction activities. Next the class has activities that are designed to acquaint the students with one another and the instructor and with setting an appropriate classroom atmosphere for the topics. The class meets one night per week for four and one-half hours, so time is allocated within this period for a supper break and relaxation exercises.

At the first class session, following the get-acquainted activities,

research findings on the traits of effective teachers are discussed. Then, students conduct a personal assessment on vulnerability to stress, learning style(s), and the condition of themselves as whole persons. Their first assignment is to take the results of the assessments and set some personal goals to be evaluated at the end of the quarter.

At the second class session, relaxation exercises begin the session. Then, class members share goals they have set for themselves and tell how they will evaluate the outcomes. The session next focuses on the role of theory in effective teaching/helping. Among the theories/models that are studied and applied are Glasser's Reality Therapy, Behavioral Theory, Phenomenology, and Gazda's Models.

In addition to outside readings, George M. Gazda, et al. Human Relations Development, A Manual for Educators, 3rd edition, is presently used as a training tool in the areas of empathic understanding, respect, genuineness, self-disclosure, concreteness, and confrontation. Students participate in a number of practice exercises in which they evaluate one another and are evaluated by the instructor.

Films, filmstrips, and guest speakers enhance areas of study. One filmstrip that has received acclaim from students is Hans Selye's "Coping with Teacher Stress." Another aspect of the course that students positively support is the training in parent/teacher/student conferencing. The culmination of the course is the sharing by students of projects they have developed for use within their own classrooms. Feedback from students class is very positive on the usefulness of the course content and the affective dimension of the class in their current classroom environments. Class members have implemented aspects of projects they developed, as well as aspects of other projects shared within the class.

Besides offering a graduate course in the area of human relationships,

AUM faculty are involved in providing inservice programs for teachers in relationship skills. Presently, the school systems within the state are implementing the Plan for Excellence guidelines related to parent-teacher conferencing for all students within a school year. As a result, systems have called upon university faculties to assist in training administrators and teachers within the systems in effective conferencing skills. Many of the concepts used in the AUM course transfer effectively to such training.

Conclusion

The multicultural and the relationship skills courses are making an impact on the expectations of teachers and how they should deal with students from different racial and/or ethnic backgrounds. Instructors have laid the groundwork for creating a positive environment for all students in which the challenge of equity and excellence in the classroom can be met. One may dream that in several generations, multicultural education and relationship skills will be passe because teachers will be beyond the petty stereotypes our society now inflicts on individuals. Each student will be instructed on his innate potential without regard to race, ethnicity, or limitations.

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